

Former Van Staveren Building

36 Taranaki Street



Valma House, 36 Taranaki Street, Wellington (*Photo: Charles Collins, 2015*)

Summary of heritage significance

- The former Van Staveren Building is a good representative example of a 1930s medium-sized commercial building that was designed in an attractive streamlined Moderne /Art Deco style. The building's original stairwell and foyer remain extant and provide a good indication of the building's original interior styling.
- Valma House is historically significant for its association with the van Staveren family, early and prominent Wellington, and New Zealand, merchants, and an important family for the Jewish community in New Zealand.
- Valma House retains a good level of authenticity. The interior has been changed multiple times, but the exterior, the stairwell, and the foyer are largely original, and hold considerable heritage value for this reason.

District Plan:	Map 16, reference 279
Legal Description:	Lot 2 DP 11229
Heritage Area:	No
HPT Listed:	Not listed
Archaeological Site:	Central City NZAA R27/270. It is associated with the Te Aro Pā known sites.
Other Names:	Valma House
Key physical dates:	1937: Construction
Architect / Builder:	Swan and Lavelle
Former uses:	Commercial, retail
Current uses:	Commercial, retail, residential
Earthquake Prone Status:	Not Earthquake Prone (SR 190172)

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

This four-storey Art Deco building currently known as Valma House, was built in 1937 for van Staveren Bros.¹, who were merchants and importers. They previously had offices on The Terrace. Barend van Staveren was born and educated in Wellington. He founded Van Staveren Bros. with two of his brothers, Isaac and Herman, in 1905 and was managing director for a remarkable 58 years.

The firm became very successful, with branches in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin. Its success derived from the number of important agencies that the firm held. By the 1950s, with the brothers still in charge, they were the agents for sporting goods, tobacco manufacturers and accessories, hair products, clocks and watches, and a great many other products.²

In 1942 an air raid shelter was erected within the building as a wartime precaution.

Barend van Staveren was a leader of Wellington's Hebrew community³ and died in 1963. The firm survived until the late 1980s. The building was sold to Fletcher Challenge in 1987, then to Book Tokens NZ Ltd in 1993.

The former Van Staveren Building has heritage value primarily for its architectural and historical significance. The building is strongly associated with Van Staveren Brothers. As a business, Van Staveren Brothers was an important mercantile company in Wellington's economy for much of the twentieth century. As a family, the Van Staverens were important in the Jewish community, both locally and nationwide. The building's heritage value is strengthened for both its business and community links. Architecturally, Valma House is a very good example of a commercial building built in the Moderne/Art Deco styles.

1.2 Timeline of modifications

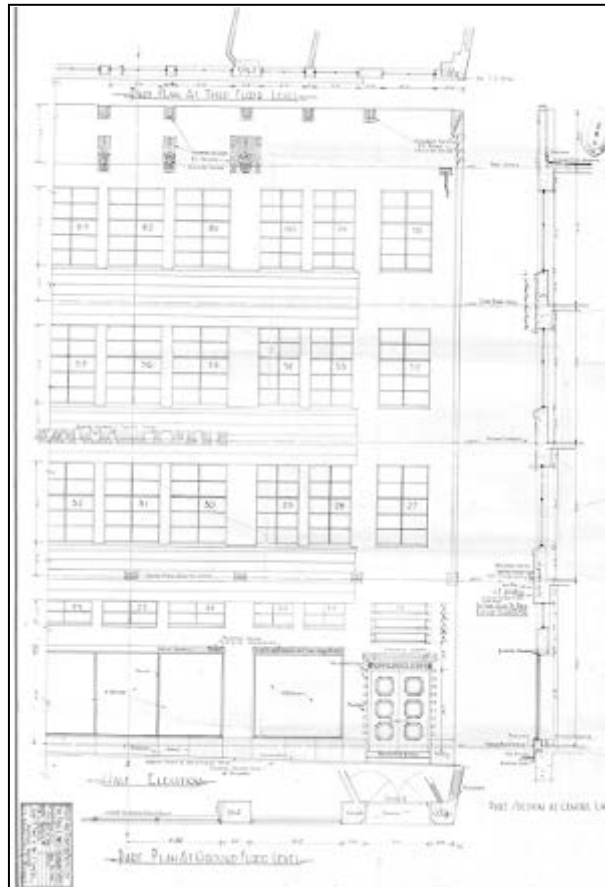
1937 Construction

1987 Proposal to build additional two floors. Permission denied.

¹ Permit B16151, WCC Archives

² Wisers New Zealand Post Office Directory Vol.2 1959

³ *Evening Post* n.d. 1963



Valma Building, part elevation, section and ground floor plan as proposed. WCC
Archive File 00056:185:B16151

1.3 Occupation history

- 1937-1980s Van Staveren Brothers Ltd.
- 1964-? Sonata Laboratories (ground floor)
- 1977-? Honda Motorcycles (ground floor)
- 1991 Commonsense Organics
- 1992-present Fujiyama Japanese Restaurant (ground floor)

1.4 Architect

From the New Zealand Historic Places Trust's entry on Swan and Lavelle⁴:

From 1906 to 1915 John Swan practiced on his own. In 1915 he was joined in practice by his younger brother, Francis H Swan, and the practice was renamed Swan and Swan. They were later joined in practice by Charles Lawrence and the firm was renamed Swan Lawrence Swan. Charles Lawrence died in 1933 and, in 1934, John Swan left to form Swan and Lavelle (the practice he left would be carried on by his younger brother, and would become known as Lawrence and Swan). In 1936, only two years later, John Swan died. Swan and Lavelle was a forerunner to the present day Structon Group Ltd which Lavelle co-founded in 1944. The Swan and Lavelle partnership only lasted eight years but it was an important link between traditional, historicist architecture and the modern idioms adopted by Lavelle and his contemporaries post-World War II.

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Valma House is a four-storey commercial building designed in a simple, Moderne/ Art Deco style.

The building's street façade is relatively symmetrical and is divided into five vertical bays. The two end bays (north and south) are relatively unadorned but feature unusual curved 'fins' at parapet level, and similar grilles and a curved canopy just above the ground floor windows. The north and south corners of the building feature a curious rounded 'staff-bead' detail that terminates at a square 'box' decoration – not unlike a horizontal triglyph on a Classical building. The central three bays of the building are notable for their distinctive Moderne streamlined banded spandrel panels. The central (3rd floor level) spandrel is inset with the words "VAN STAVEREN BROS LTD" in distinctive Art Deco lettering with a background of incised horizontal lines. The wall between the central bays forms vestigial pilasters and these are 'capped' with stylised capitals at parapet level.

The overall effect is that an otherwise utilitarian building has been transformed into one with considerable street presence - because of the use of a sparing palette of highly stylised Art Deco and Moderne motifs. Horizontality is further emphasized by the horizontal proportions of the glazing. The original steel windows are notable survivors and make a strong contribution to the aesthetic value of this building.

The ground floor was modified for restaurant use. The entrance to the upper floors retains a high level of authenticity and has significant heritage value. The interior, including the doors (and the lift door), and the extensive terrazzo finishes to floors and stairs are all untouched original fabric, typical of the time but now rare.

The secondary Lukes Lane façade is a pleasant utilitarian arrangement of large (original) steel windows set in a rendered concrete wall. A modern 'K-brace' exoskeleton has been added to part of this façade.

⁴ New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Swan and Lavelle – Architectural Partnership', accessed July 2013, at <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Swan+and+Lavelle>

2.2 Materials

Reinforced concrete

2.3 Setting

The building has townscape value for the role it plays in defining the west side of lower Taranaki Street. Although its immediate neighbours are incompatible, it is seen in conjunction with period buildings on the other side of the street, including Manthel Motors and the former Taranaki Street Police Station. It stands on the corner of Lukes Lane, its façade to this narrow lane showing the regularity and simplicity of an industrial building, with no hint of anything but function.

3.0 Sources

Evening Post n.d. 1963

Wellington City Council. Permit B16151.

_____. Valma Building, Part Plan at Ground Floor, as proposed. WCC Archive File 00056:185:B16151

Wises New Zealand Post Office Directory Vol.2 1959

Gregory, Matthew. '36-38 Taranaki Street, Valma House: Cultural Heritage Assessment and Conservation Plan'. Assignment prepared for ARCH 281: Heritage Conservation, Victoria University of Wellington, n.d.

New Zealand Historic Places Trust, 'Swan and Lavelle – Architectural Partnership', accessed July 2013, at <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?CPName=Swan+and+Lavelle>

Wellington City Council. 'Heritage Building – 36 Taranaki Street, Valma House.' File No. 1041-06-TAR36 Vol. 1.

4.0 Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?

The former Van Staveren Building is a good representative example of a 1930s medium-sized commercial building that was designed in an attractive streamlined Moderne /Art Deco style. The building's original stairwell and foyer remain extant and provide a good indication of the building's original interior styling.

Townscape: Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?

The building has townscape value for helping to define and add visual interest to lower Taranaki Street.

Group: Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?

Historic Value:

Association: Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?

The building has historical significance because of its association with the van Staveren brothers and as the head-office of their nationwide business as merchants. The van Staveren family were active in the Jewish community in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Herman van Staveren, (father of the van Staveren brothers) had arrived in Wellington in 1877 and was a local religious leader.

The building was designed by William Lavelle, a notable Wellington architect.

Association: Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?

Central City archaeological site reference NZAA R27/270. The building is also located in an areas known to be associated with the Te Aro Pā.

Educational: Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?

Technological: Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?

Social Value:

Public esteem: Is the item held in high public esteem?

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?

Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?

Valma House has been in constant commercial use since its construction in 1937. For this reason, the building makes a significant contribution to a sense of place and continuity for downtown Wellington.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The former Van Staveren Building is a very good representative of a commercial building constructed in the 1930s in the Moderne and Art Deco style.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

The former Van Staveren Building retains a good level of authenticity. The interior has been changed multiple times, but the exterior, the stairwell, and the foyer are largely original and hold considerable heritage value for this reason.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

Valma House is important on a local level.

5.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory	Y	
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
WCC Records – building file	Y	
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)	N	
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory	Y	
Plan change?	N	
Heritage Area Report	N	
Heritage Area Spreadsheet	N	
Heritage items folder (electronic)	N	
HPT website	N	
HPT files	N	
Conservation Plan	Y	
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)	Y	

Background research

Insert any relevant background information into this section. This may include:

- *Additional plans, such as those for alterations*
- *Chunks of text from other sources such as Cyclopedia of NZ, Papers Past*
- *Additional images*